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ABSTRACT

A sample of 2,486 full-time, non-freshmen students enrolled in Minnesota's public post-secondary institutions were surveyed during fall 1978 by the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board to determine their experiences with and attitudes toward the college transfer process. Survey results, based on a 75% response rate, indicated that: (1) 19.4% of the respondents had transferred, 23.3% had considered transferring but did not, and 57.3% had never given it any thought; (2) community college students had the highest proportion involved in a transfer; (3) only 56% of those who did transfer had expected to do so when they first enrolled; (4) over 50% of the students said that a transfer would not slow down their academic time tables; (5) 66% of those who did transfer lost no credits; (6) only 18% were unsatisfied with the way their transfer was handled; (7) most of the respondents felt that they were not adequately informed as to how a transfer might affect their educational plans; and (8) most who had transferred had a favorable attitude toward the process. The survey report concludes with recommendations for the establishment of a uniform state transfer policy and for refinements in current procedures to increase student awareness of the transfer procedure. (JP)

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CREDIT TRANSFER

IN MINNESOTA

April, 1979

STAFF TECHNICAL PAPER

Prepared by the Staff of the

MINNESOTA HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

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CREDIT TRANSFER IN MINNESOTA POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Executive Summary

Transferring credits from one institution to another affects many of Minnisota's post-secondary students, as well as institutions and their faculty, and governmental agencies. The Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board has been interested in the issue of credit transfer for many years, and the 1977 Legislature amended Minnesota law in a manner that increased the Board's involvement in this issue.[1]

Following the legislative action, HECB staff began an examination of credit transfer. The Executive Director convened a special advisorty committee composed of students, faculty members and academic officers of Minnesota's private and public post-secondary institutions. This group discussed the many factors related to credit transfer and the interrelationships between those factors. Staff and committee members agreed that lack of firm data regarding credit transfer was a limiting factor, and decided that a survey of students would be the most appropriate way to gather information related to the issue.

A portion of Minnesota's total post-secondary enrollment was selected for the survey. The sampling method used provided information that could be generalized to all students enrolled full-time in public institutions. Because the sample was drawn from among all students, there were three categories of respondents: 1) students who had actually transferred at least once; 2) students who had considered transferring, but had not; and 3) students who had not considered transferring.

Over 75% of the students that were selected for the survey completed a questionnaire. Out of the 1,882 respondents, there were 366 (19.4%) who reported that they had transferred. There were 438 students (23.3%) who said they had considered transferring, but had not gone through with it. The other 1,078 students (57.3% of the total) reported they had never given serious consideration to transferring.

The survey indicated that transfer of credit in Minnesota is a common occurrence. The response from students indicates that although some students experience some problems with the process, most students are able to complete the necessary procedures and progress toward their objectives. Students did suggest that they would appreciate additional information regarding the transfer process and its potential effect on their educational progress.

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[1] Laws of Minnesota 1977, Chapter 136A.04.

CREDIT TRANSFER IN MINNESOTA

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

Transferring educational credits from one institution to another affects a large number of post-secondary students each year in Minnesota. The Coordinating Board's 1977 transfer survey found that over 12,000 students had moved from one institution to another before the 1977-78 school year began. For a variety of reasons students often find it necessary or desirable to change institutions. It has been estimated, for example, that 40% of the students who attend the University of Minnesota have transferred at least once prior to completing their baccalaureate degree.

Transfer of credit affects students and their parents. It affects post-secondary education institutions and the faculty of those institutions. It affects the general public and governmental bodies as well. Students usually want to complete their post-secondary educational experience in as short a time as possible. Delay can be very expensive. Institutions are concerned with transfer because of their obligation to assure that each degree they grant reflects a high quality educational experience, and the knowledge that their faculty are responsible for the quality of each graduate. The public is interested in transfer because of its concern that public resources be expended in the most efficient and effective manner. Repetition of seemingly identical courses is seen as a waste of limited financial resources and an undue hardship for students.

The viewpoints of these three constituent groups are not always in concurrence. Some students express dissatisfaction with how their request for transfer has been handled by one or more institutions. Faculty

and institutions sometimes resist granting academic credit for previous experience that appears inappropriate or of inadequate quality to qualify toward a specific degree program. The public may express a desire to resolve issues quickly and simply. However, there are many implicit and explicit implications of any action that involves transfer of credit.

It is well documented that students frequently change their goals and subsequently the institution they attend. Because different institutions are accredited by different accrediting agencies, serve different types of students, and employ faculties from widely different backgrounds, it is not surprising that they are concerned about curricular requirements and standards for their students. When a student clashes with an institution's established criteria for a given program, a third party such as the legislature, is often drawn into the situation and asked to find a workable resolution. Such an issue was raised again during the 1977 legislative session and led to new legislation.

The 1977 Legislature amended the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board's duties by requiring the Board to continuously study and monitor credit transferability and transcript policies. The legislation also requires the Board to recommend measures for increasing credit transferability, for improving student awareness of transfer policies, and for causing transcripts to reflect transfer credits. In addition, the Board is to encourage communications among faculty, staff and students, and to make progress reports to appropriate legislative committees in 1978 and 1979.

II. BACKGROUND

The Board has been involved with the issue of credit transfer almost continuously since its inception, and a student survey was conducted

in 1969. Besides its annual survey of transfer activity, the Board has been involved with two major studies regarding transfer. Recommendations from these earlier studies are reported in the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board's Planning Report 8 (1970),[1] and in Making the Transition (1975).[2] The 1970 report involved a survey of 5,000 students who had transferred from one post-secondary system to another during the 1969-70 school year. In 1973-74, the Board conducted another study of the transfer situation in Minnesota through a comprehensive questionnaire completed by each institution regarding undergraduate student transfer. The 1970 report concluded that while transfer affected a large number of students, the process was working to the students' and institutions' satisfaction. The Board's 1975 study examined the procedures and policies of the state's systems and institutions. The results indicated that the various institutions were making efforts to improve student movement from one institution to another to increase the accessibility of educational programs. Recommendations from that study involved refinements in established procedures regarding credit transfer.

III. SURVEY METHOD

As the result of the 1977 legislation, HECB staff began to examine the credit transfer issue. An advisory group was established by the Board to examine issues related to transfer. Students, faculty and academic officers representing public and private post-secondary institutions were appointed to a Transfer Task Force by the Board's executive director (see Appendix for membership list).

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[1] Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Commission, Planning Report 8: Statewide Curriculum Study of Minnesota Higher Education, 1970

[2] Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Commission, Making the Transition, 1975 Report to the Legislature, 1975

Starting in December, 1977 the Transfer Task Force met regularly and discussed relevant issues. As a result of extensive discussion regarding the lack of firm data on which to base policy recommendations, staff and members of the task force agreed that a survey of post-secondary students would be an appropriate method to determine the magnitude of the transfer situation.

A survey was conducted to gather information that would assist in developing transfer policy recommendations. Issues addressed in the survey included why students transfer, the ease with which transfer occurs, problems students encounter and student satisfaction with transfer procedures. Financial considerations prevented a survey of all students. It was decided, therefore, to survey a random sample which would: 1) identify students' general perceptions about the transfer process, as well as describe the experience of students who had transferred; 2) identify students who wanted to transfer, but did not; and 3) more accurately describe the nature and scope of difficulties encountered by students when they transfer. While only a small proportion of all students was selected for the survey, the use of a carefully designed research procedure assured that valid conclusions could be drawn, and made it possible to generalize to the entire student population.

The questionnaire that was developed was structured for sequential self-administration, according to the extent of a respondents' transfer-related experience. The questionnaire contained three major sections

--Part I, to be completed by everyone included in the sample of students, contained basic demographic information (e.g., age, sex, year in school, as well as students' opinions about the transfer process);

--Part II, to be completed by all those students who seriously considered transferring, contained questions about their reasons for wanting to transfer, questions about the number of their attempts to transfer, and questions about ways in which the process of transferring might have been made easier for them; and

--Part III, to be completed by students who actually transferred, contained questions about the institution from which the student transferred, questions about the institution to which the student transferred, as well as questions about positive and negative effects of having transferred.

Students who could not be surveyed included:

1. Students currently attending private colleges, universities, and proprietary institutions,

2. Former students not enrolled fall of 1978,

3. Part-time or continuing education enrollees,

4. Graduate school enrollees,

5. Students enrolled at Metropolitan State University

Students attending private institutions were not surveyed mainly because of the difficulty of obtaining names and addresses from which a sample could be drawn, and the fact that public policy has a more limited effect on the practices followed in private institutions. Contacting former, but not currently enrolled students would have required a large expenditure of funds and a complex sampling procedure. Students who enroll less than full-time were excluded from the survey because it is difficult to define who would be included and how they would be contacted. Graduate students were excluded because the transfer of graduate credits reflects a distinctly different problem due to program length, program requirements and the number of students involved. Students enrolled at Metropolitan State University were excluded primarily because Metropolitan was established to serve "non-traditional," part-time students with various past experiences. While these exclusions may impose some limitations on the survey results, they are

based on a sample of almost 80% of the State's total undergraduate enrollment, and will not adversely affect the conclusions drawn regarding credit transfer among full-time, publiv post-secondary students.

IV. FINDINGS

The sampling plan for this survey was designed so that sample results would generalize to systems in which students were currently enrolled and so that the results would be representative of students enrolled in the various institutions within a particular system. A total of 2,486 students was selected for the survey from among the 76,029 students enrolled Fall, 1978 in Minnesota's public post-secondary education institutions who met the survey criteria of being full-time students not enrolled in their first year of collegiate experience. There were an additional 29,235 freshmen enrolled in public colleges and universities fall quarter, which means the survey represents over 105,000 full-time students.

The following conclusions can be drawn from this survey of post-secondary education students:

1. Transfer affects a large number of students. Of the 1,882 students contacted, 811 (44%) indicated that they had considered transferring from one institution to another. More than one-fifth of all students surveyed indicated they had actually transferred at least once, while two out of every five students currently enrolled at the University of Minnesota said they had transferred.

2. Transfer affects students from all types of institutions. As might be expected, community college students had the highest proportion involved in transfer; 43% of the respondents said they moved from community colleges. The second highest proportion (23%) were students who transferred from private institutions to public institutions. Students from AVTI's made up the smallest group (4.5%) of students who indicated they had transferred.

3. Transfer affects many people who do not expect it. Only 56% of those who completed a transfer indicated that they expected to transfer when they first enrolled in post-secondary education. Such an experience was expected by a high proportion of those who first enrolled in a community college, but anticipated by few who initially enrolled in an AVTI.

4. Transfer usually occurs to fulfill an academic need. The three most common reasons given for transferring were: a) to complete a four year college degree, b) to pursue a major or program not available at the first institution, and c) because of a preference for the courses available at the second institution. Some transfer students stated a preference for the social atmosphere of their new institution, and lower costs.

5. Transfer does not usually slow down a student's academic timetable. Over half the respondents said transfer would not increase the time required to complete their degree. For students that will require more time, it will involve an average of one or two quarters longer to complete their education, with 94% indicating they expected to complete their program within an additional 12 months.

6. Transfer students lose very few credits when they move. Two-thirds of those who transferred reported losing no credits. While the average loss was five quarter credits, students transferring to the state universities lost an average of just one credit. The average number of credits transferred was 68. Of this total, an average of 16 was accepted toward the student's major, while 38 were accepted toward general education requirements.

7. Transfer students are satisfied with their treatment. Less than 15% of those who transferred expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of credits they were allowed, and only about 18% were not satisfied with the way their transfer was handled.

8. Transfer students do not feel they are well informed about the effect of transfer. Seventy percent of the students indicated they were not adequately informed regarding how a transfer might affect their educational plan. About three-fourths of the students also reported they were not aware of an appeals process at their institution. Of those who were aware of the appeals process, only one out of four used it.

9. Transfer students find the procedure less troublesome than expected. Students who actually transferred have a more favorable attitude toward the process than those who have never gone through a transfer experience and perceive it as less difficult. Those who had not transferred expressed a greater fear of credit loss and other problems than those who had. Most students would repeat their action; 85% of those who transferred said they would do it again.

Assuming that the preceding information is accurate, the typical transfer student in Minnesota could be described as follows:

- 22 years old.
- had 68 credits accepted into the current institution.

- moved between spring and fall of the same year.
- is satisfied with the credits that were accepted, the handling of the process, and the move to a different institution.
- will not lose time due to transferring to pursue a four year degree.
- is not adequately informed as to how transfer might affect progress and plans.
- is not aware of the institution's appeals procedure regarding transfer.
- suggests that improvements could be made by:
    a) providing general information regarding transferability of credits
    b) better advising
    c) making information available by phone
    d) providing more general information regarding the institution to which transfer is contemplated.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The credit a student receives for work completed at a particular post-secondary institution is closely tied to his/her purpose for enrolling in a particular educational program. There are no universal standards for evaluating the worth of particular educational experiences, although "the credit" is commonly used as the unit for defining the magnitude of educational experiences. What is worthy of credit in one state, system or institution, may not, however, carry the same credit in another state, system or institution. This concern is particularly important in examining what happens to students who attend more than one post-secondary institution. Taking these comments into account, it can be concluded that:

1. Although some students experience difficulty when attempting to transfer, the current survey indicated that most students are able to complete the procedure with little inconvenience or loss of time. Based

on student response to the questions asked, it would not seem appropriate to propose major changes in current policies and practices. Given the student satisfaction expressed in the survey it would not, for example, appear necessary nor desirable to establish one, uniform state policy that would apply to all post-secondary institutions. Because each institution must accept the responsibility for the quality of its programs and graduates, imposition of a uniform policy would not appear desirable or beneficial to students, educational institutions or society.

2. While major changes do not appear necessary, some refinements in current procedures that will increase student awareness of the transfer process and its implications may be desirable. If the problem is one of lack of information for students regarding transfer, steps could be taken to improve the situation. The MHECB could, for example, work with representatives of the state's post-secondary education institutions to develop an informative brochure regarding transfer. Such a document could bring together information currently available from each institution or system and provide a convenient first reference for students on the issue. Although this type of document could not address all issues related to transfer, it might include a directory of institutional contacts for those seeking more detailed information. A document of this type would be useful to high school and post-secondary students and counselors as well as people who deal with potential post-secondary students; e.g., Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) centers, Employment Service offices, prisons and counseling centers.

3. Additional efforts may be necessary to insure that all students are made aware of the appeal procedures that are available. A high proportion of those who transferred indicated they were not aware of an appeals procedure at their institution which would allow them to seek redress for their grievance, even though all institutions have an established procedure

for this type of situation. If the problem is one of poor communication, one possible solution might be to distribute copies of the procedure to each student. Another solution might be to require that students sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the institution's transfer and appeals procedure when they register.

4. The transfer process is providing students greater access to the courses and programs they seek. The current survey provided much useful information regarding the transfer situtation in Minnesota. It reinforced many of the findings of earlier surveys (1970, 1974) and included a broader cross-section of post-secondary students than the previous studies. Although some individuals perceive that they have not been treated fairly, the survey results do not indicate that large numbers of students feel the process is unfair or unworkable. Any process that involves over 12,000 people each year is likely to result in dissatisfaction for some participants. This survey would suggest that this is indeed the situation and that most students resolve their transfer request to their satisfaction. Refinements can and should be taken to improve this very important aspect of post-secondary education. Examination of current procedures should continue and all relevant institutions, systems and agencies should pledge their efforts to continued improvement of the process to serve the best interest of students and institutions.

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